

UNCLAS CAIRO 004304

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAQ](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: CRITICS ACCUSE NDP OF USING "THUGS" AND "MERCENARIES" AGAINST OPPOSITION: EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES, MAY 31 TO JUNE 5

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: While the pro-government press was praising the May 25 referendum, independent and opposition commentators criticized what they considered poor media coverage and accused ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) members of acting like "thugs" and "mercenaries." One commentator likened the government-owned media's referendum coverage to that of the "Nasser era." A female journalist, who was assaulted during referendum day violence, confronted an NDP member in a heated exchange on live TV. In other news, two well-known opposition papers reported on June 5 that Embassy Cairo was recruiting spies through a job listing published in Al Ahram to fill a vacancy in the Economic political section. End summary.

¶2. (U) May 25 referendum aftermath - coverage: The June 3 front page of pro-government Al Ahram (circulation: 750,000) highlighted a statement by President Mubarak that Egyptian presidential elections later this year will be "honest and free" and that there would be "an investigation of the violent events on referendum day." The same day, Al Ahram claimed that democracy would be "Mubarak's heritage to the world," and reported on President Bush's phone call to Mubarak, during which President Bush allegedly said that Egypt's democracy would be a "model to the Middle East." All newspapers reported on June 1 that the Press Syndicate forwarded to the Public Prosecutor a complaint about violent acts committed against journalists covering demonstrations on May 25.

¶3. (U) May 25 referendum aftermath - commentary: While pro-government commentary on the violence was virtually non-existent - one commentator in pro-government Al Akhbar (circulation: 800,000) did claim on May 31 that the violence was "regrettable" - the opposition and independent press had much to say. Opposition Al Wafd (circulation: 180,000) focused its criticism on the Egyptian state-controlled media. "The May 25 referendum propaganda campaign was like that of the Nasser era media!" railed Al Wafd Editor-in-chief Abbas Tarabeely on June 4. A commentator in independent Al Masry Al Youm (circulation: 20,000) on May 31 accused the NDP of using "thugs" and "mercenaries" against its opponents. Another commentator in independent Nahdet Masr (circulation: 20,000) on May 31 condemned "the harassment of women" and "violence by NDP members" during the referendum. On June 5 the Editor-in-chief of popular independent weekly Sawt Al Umma (circulation: 50,000) lamented, "The Egyptian security apparatus has hijacked our country. Egyptians do not want to live under the shoes of the Ministry of Interior and thugs!" Meanwhile, Egyptian satellite TV channel "Orbit" hosted live on June 1 a heated debate between a female journalist, Nawal Aly, who was beaten while covering the referendum, and NDP member and journalist Dr. Magdi Alam. Aly accused Alam of inciting violence, while Alam claimed that Aly had allowed herself to be "used" by members of the Kifaya ("Enough") movement.

¶4. (SBU) U.S. Embassy Cairo recruiting spies through the press?: On June 2, Al Masry Al Youm published a short article on its front page claiming that unnamed "political observers" believed that an Embassy Cairo job advertisement for a new political section specialist, published in Al Ahram on May 29, was, in fact, "a call for Egyptians to gather information on their country and spy against it." (Note: Half the article was devoted to a PA officer's on-the-record denial of the allegation. End note.) On June 5, two more articles appeared - a front-page story in opposition Nasserite Al Arabi (circulation: 20,000) and a Page 2 story in Nasserite Al Osbo'a (circulation: 70,000) - both repeating Al Masry Al Youm's claim, without quoting a source of the accusation or the Embassy's denial.

GRAY

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